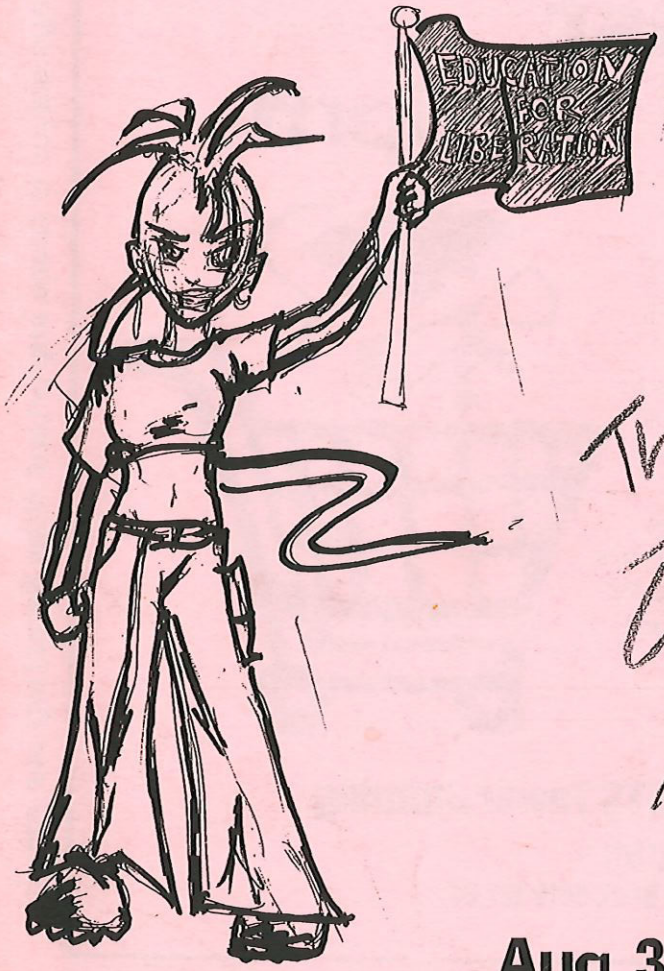
EDUCATION BLOC @ THE FORBES CONVERGENCE



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Aug 30 - Sept 1

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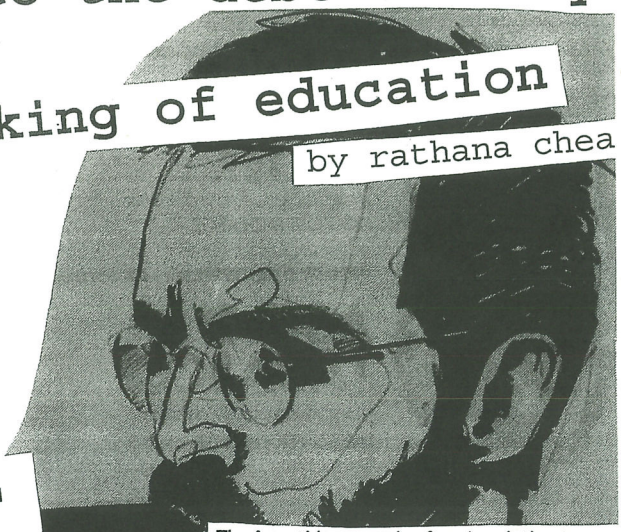
Because creating docile wage slaves is more important than liberating our minds

Because our unis are used as a think-tank for the military

a life on loan... introduction to the debt economy and the banking of education

by rathana chea



EDUCATION CRUSADERS

It has been argued numerous times over that student debt is a major deterrent for potential students, particularly from Lower Socio-Economic backgrounds to participate in Tertiary Education. Since the introduction of HECS, specifically the three tiered HECS system as well as the recent 25% increases on many campuses, Education activists have made bold claims to represent the working class people. This includes grandiose bleeding heart speeches in front of passive audiences 'exposing' the greed of management at the expense of students and how we as the organised Left are the misunderstood messiahs.

This hip-pocket form of consciousness raising relies heavily on a consumer mentality around our interaction with education institutions. That an exchange process is occurring in the banking of monies and banking of knowledge. It is becoming clear we are the generation who's consciousness about education has been affected by the privatisation of education ; Education being a private investment rather than being of any public good.

THE ECONOMICS OF STUDENTS AND EDUCATION

Even when we raise the question central to all this, our working lives, we often do it in way which describes the debt as burden. That somehow we are freer in our working lives to purchase other debts, like a home, a car, a holiday if education didn't have such a personal monetary burden for our 'education'.

It is debatable, however, whether or not tertiary education is even a guarantee of economic mobility or stability. If we compare TAFE graduates to University graduates on the basis of full-time employment within their first year there is only a 3.8%[1] difference. Income is levels do not sharply contrast either with TAFE graduates averaging $462 and University graduates averaging $635 weekly income.[2] This doesn't even factor in levels of stratified progressive income taxation. So then examining the possible trajectories most people would assume that the wages would be higher for the University graduate, because of their 'investment' in their 'education'. Factor in debt, however, with University HECS fees ranging from $3,600 to $6,000 per annum and TAFE fees, which vary from $450 to $700 per course[3] we can begin to see that the variance becomes muted. This is true, at least, for the first couple

The 'asset' however is often in relation to prestige. The perception that someone has greater social capital if they attend university. People who make it to university after being processed through the socio-economically stratified, homogeneous curricular, heterosexis and hetero-patriarchal, cultural bias primary and secondary school system become culturally integrated into the behavioural patterns of the middle class. Networking also plays a huge role in the development of social capital.

So what we have then is a group of people bound together, generally, by ambition for and expected of social mobility ; skilled in the corporate language of management, competition and superiority.

So the question then becomes, what purpose does The Education System actually serve?

STUDENTS, THE ECONOMY AND EDUCATION

Student are Customers, Universities are businesses. The current ruling party, the Liberals, are explicit in their belief that Vice Chancellors should be called Chief Executive Officers and University Councils operate more like a board of directors for a business.[4] The

life of a student then, from the governments perspective one of the business transaction based on knowledge banking. As students we transition from Customers to Products, much like a make-over for the brain. In this transition / transaction we are reduced to functionaries to the economic role the education system plays in the Australian economy.

ıus, if university management operates as
ısiness, 'education' then becomes a form of
‹illing' reducing the role of the university to
vocational training ground for exploitation
/ the corporations for the 'benefit' of the
:onomy. Some sinister examples include
ıab Systems [military technology specialist]
ıonsoring history at Flinders, Raytheon
ɔmpany [global leader is defence technologies]
ırtnering in research at University of Western
ıstralia and the University of Technology,
/dney only recently severing ties with ANSTO
:ompany that runs the Nuclear reactor in
/dney]. There are also many examples where
niversities have been used to peddle the
ɔvernments own agenda including generating
ıemical weapons. For example, UQ researchers
iscovered Napalm which was then used during
ıe American Invasion of Vietnam.

The coercive role of the University upon its participants is closely tied in with where the University gets its funding. Commercialisation not only trivialises any 'educational' process but amplifies what is already currently in place. Universities like many other education institutions are designed for the skilled integration of a passive workforce into the labour market. Instead of buying us once we have graduated, by funding and hence influencing curriculum, they can essentially create dominance over their particular market.

Clever.

t is a tricky business running universities, ask Gavin Brown who is amongst the higher paid EO's in the country and who's company, Sydney Jniversity announced a profit of $93,000 in the 2002/3 budget.[5] Not enough apparently to save the undergraduate Nursing Faculty which will be axed in 2005.

So what does this all mean for students?

TILL DEBT DO US PART

Students do not have a singular identity, and these identities are not static, so any analysis of this should come with an examination of the coercive nature of the state as an apparatus and the agency of participants.

It is interesting to examine the parallels in methodology that our current ruling party has adopted in its treatment of its people and the way the bigger economies [Global North] relationship smaller economies [Global South]. The rate of borrowing by the Global South from the Global North and the rate of borrowing by people living in Australia is phenomenal with the Australian Government external debt per capita putting us behind only Qatar and Iceland as having the biggest external debt per capita in the world[6] reaching $AUS362 billion.[7] We are also in the Top 50 of the most heavily tax burdened

The borrowing / debt net creates an interdependency web which chains state economies together, however it is logical to expect that some chains are heavier than others. This can parallel the relationship we as students have with the economy. 80% of students now work and study concurrently factoring in employment opportunity and social implication of systemic oppression.

This can be described as day-to-day slavery, the relationship we have with the economy to ensure that we can eat, cover our nakedness and have somewhere to live. Whilst engaging

in this day-to-day labour exchange for survival, we sell off our future as equity through skills and knowledge 'banking' through engaging in the education system. We do this with the perception that our transaction of day-to-day slavery will increase in our favour through the acquisition of this asset [education]. What occurs then is an extension of our working lives with greater debt. Hence what is created is a chain of interdependency. The government and other corporate lenders profit from our day-to-day slavery as well as our banking on 'freedom' through the acquisition of 'knowledge'.

This is life on loan, where the currency is our freedom and the bank our labour.

This is not a crisis. The situation we find ourselves in has been carefully crafted and cleverly executed for the exploitation of working people. This is the logic of capitalism and institutions which exist to serve it. To write about what we do from here requires an evolving anthology with a progressive praxis. It is hoped we will move closer to this at this conference.

(Endnotes)

[1] 2003 figures from the Great Southern Annual Report by WA TAFE: Effectiveness indicators Section 1.3 and the Grad Files 2003, Employment Table 1a. by Gradlink.
[2] National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2000d Table 10: average weekly earnings of first full-time job holders, 1999.
[3] Centrelink Government Assistance Schemes February 2004.
[4] Backing Australia's Future paper 2003. Department of Education, Science and Training Commonwealth of Australia.
[5] Sydney University Senate papers 2003/4
[6] NationMaster.com - Economy Debt Top 100 list 2004.
[7] SMH: Foreign debt reaches a record $362 billion By Matt Wade June 4 2003
[8] Map & Graph: Economy: Budget (revenues) (per capita) (Top 100 Countries)

[a summary first printed for education conference of Rathana's original article:

VSU AND THE PRIVATISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Speech by Emilie Awbrey at Sydney Uni forum on Voluntary Student Unionism and the privatisation of Higher Education

The ideological nature of the VSU legislation is linked to the project of privatisation of higher education.

This process is more than just a measure of material reforms, involving funding cuts, increased fees and the like. Setting up a user-pays system is a battle Howard must win ideologically if he is to succeed.

The Liberals' have cut billions of dollars from higher education as they push universities to operate more like businesses. The Nelson Reforms implemented this year show very clearly that the government is committed to privatising higher education.

Destroying unions on campus is essential to setting up the individually based user-pays system. Just as deregulation of the industrial law system requires smashing the unions workers' have used to organise themselves for many years through the introduction of individual agreements. The drive against unions is a central feature of Howard's ideological battle.

The VSU is not just aimed at clearing the ground of opposition for the restructuring of universities. It is also about disciplining people into an understanding of society which is based on business principles, individualisation, competition and total acceptance of the market order. It does this by destroying any collective structures present in the organisation of higher education, the capacity of students to organise for themselves.

The contradictions in the ways that universities operate are becoming more exposed as the Nelson Legislation is implemented and the market priorities are made starker. In this vision, students become customers, passively receiving doses of education to suit the corporate priorities which are increasingly dominating our universities.

This issue also relates to a debate in the campaign has been about the nature of alliances we build, and of what role the Vice Chancellors are playing in the implementation of VSU.

It is not the Vice Chancellors who are going to be an ideological force of opposition to union smashing and privatised education. The Vice Chancellors are in favour of deregulating higher education, and of running the universities like business. The free enterprise ideology underlying VSU corresponds closely to the agenda pursued by the Vice Chancellors.

They may claim to be against VSU, but already the AVCC has spoken out in favour of collecting only an amenities fee, not fees which the student unions could use to organise political campaigns. They have also attacked the staff union, trying to introduce individual agreements onto campus in the last round of Enterprise Bargaining. Clearly, it is not them who will fight for publicly funded education. It is also clear that when students have stood up to the Vice Chancellor, in the campaign against increased HECS for example, he has not been afraid to use all the force of the police to shut us up. Pepper spray, riot police and mounted police, arrests and more were all been used against student protests last year.

The Vice Chancellors happiness to preserve union service delivery is a cover for their real belief that education services can be delivered just as efficiently through the market. In this context Vice Chancellors and the governing bodies of universities should remain political targets in the campaign against VSU.

The force that is could to stop Howard fully implementing his neo-lib dream on campus is unions. It

is unions, student and staff, which stand between Howard and his vision of a privatised higher education system. It is no wonder he wants to smash them when both the staff and student unions have a history of organising and resisting, often successfully, the reforms he has tried to bring into the higher eduction sector.

The campaigns against Austudy, HECS and full up front fees were organised in the student unions, including thousands of students participating in demonstrations, occupations and more. It is student unions that will play the most important role in this campaign, as has been demonstrated by previous education campaigns.

If it wasn't for these struggles, full fees for undergraduate students would already be in place, and similarly, the campaign in 1999 against VSU defeated it, meaning student unions would have already been obliterated by user pays if students hadn't organised together to convince other students to resist the politics behind the policy, with a campaign built around a fight against privatisation of education, and against union bashing.

This is why we need a political campaign against VSU. Students won't have any collective voice if we consent to the ideas of "acceptable" political representation defined by the Liberals and the Vice Chancellors. Curbing political activity is exactly what Liberal politicians have in mind when they talk about introducing optional membership of student organisations now. Nelson as repeatedly pointed to student involvement in the pro-refugee protests at Woomera and Baxter detention centres as a central example of the reasons the government wants VSU legislation.

The kind of demonstrations used by the last VSU campaign were integral to forcing Howard to step back. A series of politically focussed demonstrations (no cuts, no fees, no VSU) created a political climate which became a problem for Howard. It also allowed independent Senators to vote against the legislation, in the end the nail in the coffin.

Since the re-election of Howard last year many progressive people, have felt a sense of demoralisation and defeat. But the federal Senate majority does not mean all hopes are lost for beating back the VSU legislation.

There is no doubt that Howard's re-election is significant and has intensified the attacks on public education, and particularly noticeably in the last budget, health and welfare. And it is not useful to underestimate the extent to which Howard may well take advantage of the government's Senate majority.

But simultaneously there a widespread belief in the provision of public education, in funding for hospitals, just as there are sizeable majorities against the war in Iraq, or in support of abortion rights.

Howard is not invincible. And in any case the Senate hasn't really been much of an obstacle to the Coalition government over the last eight years. Even without a Senate majority the Coalition was able to introduce the GST, and the Workplace Relations Act; and introduced a raft of legislation following the Tampa incident in 2001.

Howard uses his ideological attacks to disarm the resistance to his conservative economic and social policies. Again and again his dog whistle to the far right has been used to re-mould public opinion and shift the social agenda rightwards.

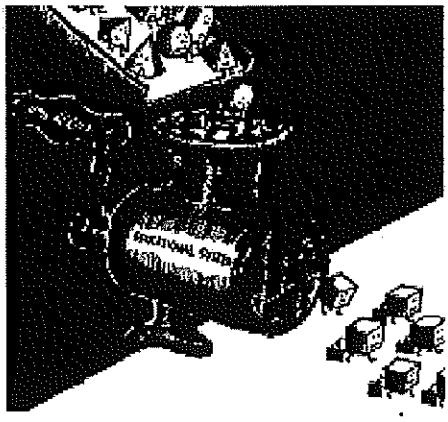
His education minister uses arguments about freedom of choice to spearhead his attack on student unions. But as we know, the push for voluntary student unionism, like his attack on the trade unions is driven by political motivations, not choice.

In the struggles and fights that will no doubt eventuate against the Howard government, being ideologically armed will be as essential as picket lines, protests and demonstrations if we are to stop his policies.

Over the past eight years of Coalition government it has been the fights outside of the parliamentary process that have been crucial. As the attacks intensify discussions will open up amongst the millions of people who do not share Howard's politics of individualism, competition and self interest. That is why it matters how we as the left respond to the government's attacks.

There is no room in this campaign for opportunistically promoting individualism, we do not defend

student unions on the basis of what they can deliver, be it cheap beer or otherwise, for individual students. This is not to say we do not defend the services offered by our student organisations, such as the welfare services or childcare. But it matters that we defend them in the terms of social need and of collective control.



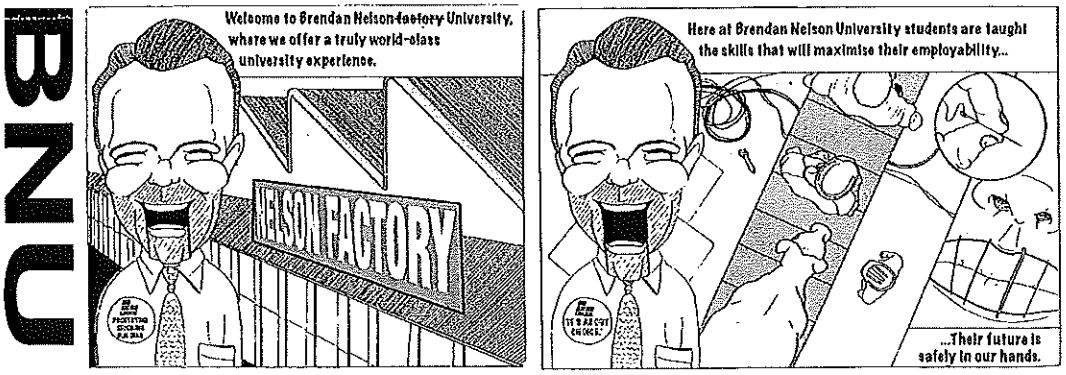
There has been a lot of criticism of the idea of a political campaign against VSU with some saying that this means we don't care about services. This is not the case. But the importance of the services is the collective benefits they bring and the political context in which they exist. Everyone who believes that student unions provide good services should be a part of this campaign, but the strategy of the campaign is not to promote user pays in the union, but needs to be to fight against the broader ideological conditions of which this particular legislation is a part.

That is why it is critical that the anti-VSU campaign is targeted at resisting privatisation and the restructuring of higher education around principles of user-pays. Concretely the issues of the Liberals' cuts, the moves to introduce full fees and the IR laws Howard is trying to introduce on campus can be linked to VSU to show the true agenda of Howard. Trade unions and student unions alike stand in the way of Howard's vision of a society of individuals driven by self-interest.

Defending ourselves and public education necessitates building a campaign which shows it's willingness to fight for the right to public education through both a collectively organised political challenge of the Howard's ideology and demonstrations and actions which highlight our committed opposition to them. These are the kind of politics and action that can build up enough momentum and support to create a political problem for Howard over his attacks on public education, and mobilise support in the community and on campus against them.

The Labor Left in this campaign is more or less explicitly arguing that we are fighting for a model of VSU legislation similar to that introduced in Victoria in 1999 - a softer version of that introduced in WA.

This position will take us nowhere for two reasons: one is that it is based on a fundamental pessimism about the consequences of the Senate majority.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NELSON FACTORY
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...Their future is safely in our hands.

As I have tried to draw out, our campaign should not be focussed on convincing Liberals' to please not implement the legislation, but on convincing other students about why it matters to organise in and defend unions in the present climate. We need to demand no VSU of any kind and build the campaign on this politics.

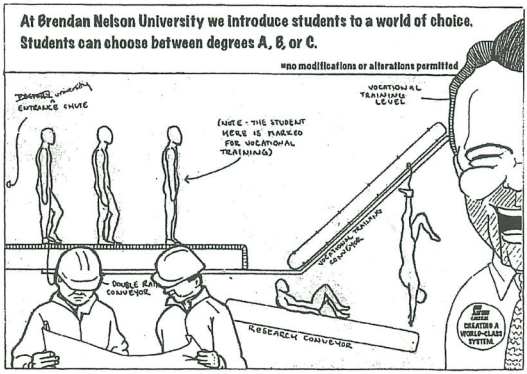
And secondly, because we cannot simply ask those in power for a better deal and think that they will hand it over. Whatever the result of this campaign, the strongest gains will be won if thousands of students demonstrating force the Liberals to back down. That is the force that will apply the most pressure.

This means, now, linking the VSU legislation with the broader ideological attacks. All our leaflets, posters and everything we say to other students is on this basis. Our demonstrations have to be collectively organised and take disruptive action against the political targets in the campaign.

Our task is to fight as hard as we can to make this legislation into a dead letter. Thousands of students on the streets, demonstrating, occupying and campaigning against this legislation will make this legislation untenable for the Liberals', if it is based on a rejection of the underlying principles of individualism.

It cannot be emphasised enough that we need to take this political understanding and turn it into a deadly weapon to beat back Howard's vision. We can make it clear that implementation of the VSU legislation will mean students refuse to let universities operate smoothly. In this sense we need to build a campaign that can, both politically and in action, make this campus ungovernable.

If Howard means business, we mean to disrupt it.


At Brendan Nelson University we introduce students to a world of choice.
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*no modifications or alterations permitted
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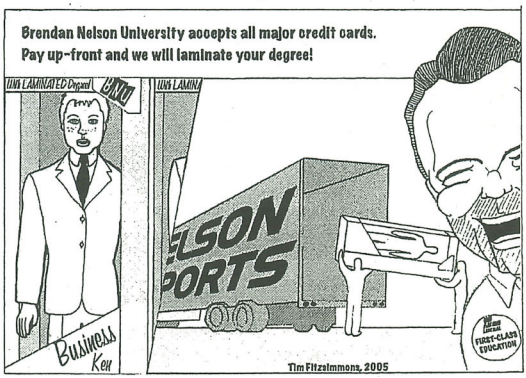
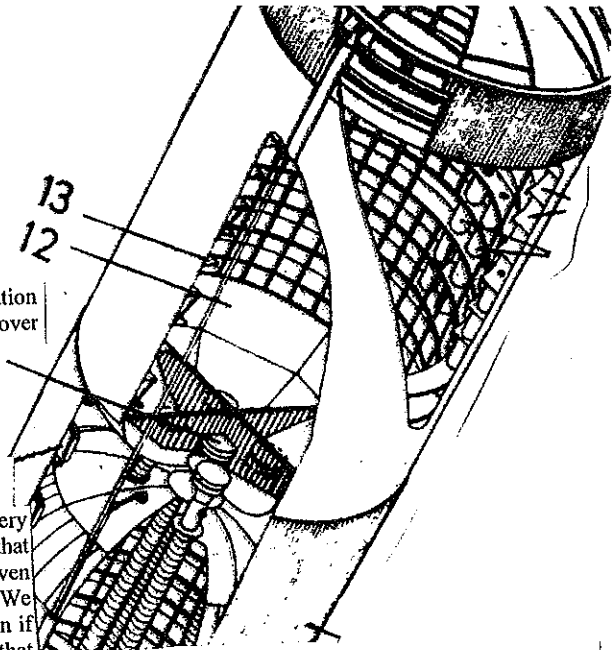
VOCATIONAL TRAINING LEVEL
(HERE - THE STUDENT HERE IS MARKED FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING)
DOUBLE RAIL CONVEYOR
RESEARCH CONVEYOR
CREATING A WORLD-CLASS SYSTEM



life during wartime

A submission from Monash Students' Association to the Senate on the real stakes in the struggle over 'voluntary student unionism'.

by ben and nick



part one – reversibility

Though the memory fades more and more every year, many of us grew up with an expectation that the welfare state would last forever, and even constantly expand to meet human needs. We believed that abortion rights had been won even if abortion is not available free and on demand; that calling someone 'homophobic' would continue to be a criticism; that military conscription would not be an option for governments seeking to send people to kill and die; that powers of arbitrary detention and torture would apply only to certain pre-designated minorities and the poor; that forms of wage-labor regarded as acceptable would not drift ever-closer to slavery.

The truth, however, is that none of this is written in stone, that all of this is reversible under the right conditions, even here, even in 'the West', in a 'developed capitalist democracy'. Much is in danger of being reversed, and much may be subject to efforts at reversal in the not-too-distant future. 'Under the right conditions.'

These 'right conditions' are about power, about the ability of people to resist. Attacks on the ability of people to resist are about creating 'the right conditions', about giving the powerful as much room to move with as little risk as they could want – and understanding this is central to a truly 'political' understanding of what is at stake in every struggle.

The core intent of the proposed anti-VSU legislation is to undermine the likelihood of resistance to the status quo or the agendas of the powerful.

part two – capitalism

Capitalism doesn't exist because we made it sometime in the nineteenth century. Capitalism won't exist tomorrow because we made it yesterday. The social relations of capitalism are made and re-made every day: every day, at every moment, capitalist social relations are imposed upon us and re-imposed upon us, by force and ultimately by violence. All of the forms of exploitation, oppression and banality that *are* existence in the very early twenty-first century are inherently and irrevocably in conflict in their constitution. There are a thousand points of antagonism making up our lives, a hundred moments in which our needs and desires are ignored suppressed or punished by Centrelink, fear of police, our employers, university administrations, transport inspectors – the enforcers, collectively, of an appalling status quo set to become even more appalling. What was new in the Redfern and Palm Island and Macquarie Fields 'riots' wasn't violence, but a new resistance to some of that violence, to the violence of everyday existence.

Radical politics begins with the realisation that what is given to us now is a life during wartime. The 'us' can be in question, but there is no choice to be a conscientious objector in these wars, since my life is what these wars are about: the need to enforce a system of relations as part of the reproduction of a planetary system of surveillance and control; the ever-increasing need to seal up any cracks in the edifice of this system.

We are far from powerless in this war, and the process by which this system reproduces itself must constantly take into account entrenched positions, moments and processes of contestation, the potential for refusal and resistance and revolt. Far from simply accepting integration, people can and do constantly contest these processes, in various ways and to varying degrees up to seeking the destruction and transcendence of all that it means to comply with the requirements and dictates of a global work-camp, up to the aspiration to destroy and transcend the global work-camp itself. In doing so people force accommodation on the part of their enemies, and then learn to take this accommodation as the norm.

But no accommodation is a permanent norm, just a temporary standoff.

Neoliberalism is the name of a set of strategies in the war to impose capitalism on terms ever more favourable to capital, to impose money-as-command over our lives, debt as the enforcer of work, work as the sole determination of our life, its quality and our survival. The forces that push to keep people isolated, powerless, competing with each other for whatever they can get, at the mercy of money to be available only through submission, our whole lives colonised by forms of violence called 'the economy' and backed up with the violence of the state – these forces will only be stalled let alone stopped by the exercise or plausible threat of the use of power against them.

The attempt to cripple student unions has many facets. The one that matters is that it is intended to reduce the possibility that anyone will be able to exercise or plausibly threaten to exercise this power. Not only to exercise this power in 'campaigns' against this or that government action or university policy, but to exercise this power in resistance to the imposition of the all-too-visible fists of 'the market' in every aspect of our lives.

The 'freedom' to be guaranteed by VSU is intended to undermine the individual and collective freedoms made possible by the resources and possibilities of student controlled organisations and resources. Forcing this individual 'freedom' upon us is about preventing us from having, asserting or seizing control over the conditions of our lives, about preventing people from asserting individual and collective freedoms beyond and against the limits of those forms of existence [illegible] the domination of capital.

'VSU' is the continuation of class warfare by the usual means: you may not be interested in politics, but politics is coming to get you.

a final note: foreigners, un-australians, terrorists & other monsters

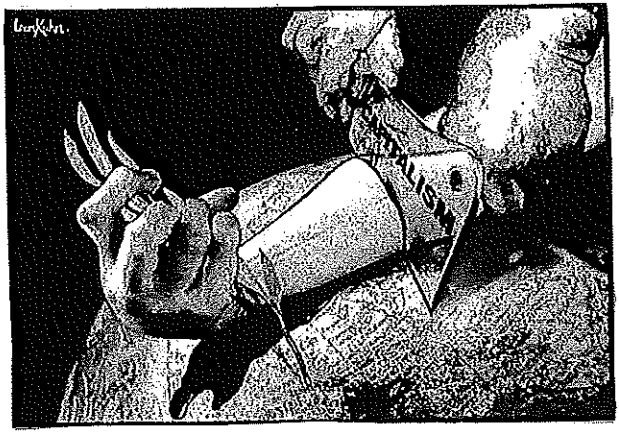
Politics both globally and locally has been increasingly reduced to a series of 'emergencies' from which violence and neoliberalism can be made to emerge. The alleged threats vary, from the weapons of mass destruction our masters pretended to believe the Iraqi state possessed, to 'ethnic gangs', queue-jumpers and people smugglers, terrorists and other foreigners, to the 'un-Australians' who protest at the border control concentration camps or at the World Trade Organisation or, soon, at the Forbes 500 conference in Sydney. The enemy can be big or small, foreign or just not *really* Australian, real or imagined.

Thanks to the continual and instrumental re-definition of the 'public enemy' by the powers-that-be, a ghastly "public opinion" defined by the corporate media and the political apparatus is given as accepting not only the violation but the erasure and fundamental invalidation of the supposed 'rights' of a civilized 'liberal democracy'. Accept? Real Australians will apparently cheer and even demand this erasure of 'human rights' as desirable and necessary in order to "defend democracy".

Liberals in Parliament have spent some time elaborating a view of student unions as 'un-Australian', involved in everything from protesting at Australia's immigration detention centres to opposing the invasion and occupation of Iraq, extremists and radicals who must be shut down, dangerous people not loyal to the status quo. The Monash Student Association was condemned in Parliament for a sticker from some time ago which read: "Support the war on terror – bomb the Whitehouse."

The more we attempt to resist the agendas of this and future governments, the more we can expect to be the object of such attentions, a prelude to the possibility of criminalisation and even harsher repression should this be judged useful and possible. Right now we need to refuse to accept the divisions between us that the deployment of this rhetoric is intended to create.

Education, the Economy and the Human Capital Theory



The importance of education as a process of socialisation, of personal and social development and of inducing critical thought is often stressed. However education has another role: to serve the demands of the economy. The education system in Australia, especially at a senior high school, TAFE and university level is primarily designed to do just that. The key to understanding this close relationship between the economy and the education system, why they are so closely related, what role the products of tertiary education tend to play in the economy and society, how university replicates and moulds present social class structures, and why the ideological push towards user-pays has been gaining so much ground is summed up in the often quoted and rarely defined concept known as the human capital theory.

So what is the human capital theory?

It is easier to answer this by explaining how an economy works and what the economic rationale for education is. The production side of any economy involves the transformation of a set of inputs, namely land (broadly defined as land, minerals, vegetation, water, air, etc), capital (meaning such things as tools, machinery, factories, etc) and labour. Capital has long been regarded as a dynamic input into the production process-- this means that its productivity can change according to the level of technology, without any change in cost. Economists began applying this idea to humans as well. Labour, it was argued, was similar to capital: it too was not a static input into the production process and its productivity could also be improved via increased training and skill enhancing. A new approach and theory was born: labour thus became human capital and education and training became a process of adding value to human capital,

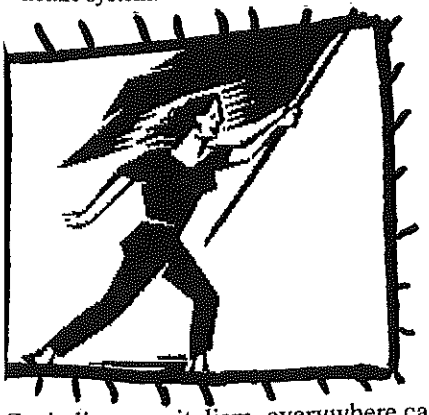
The Theory throughout the Ages

With the development of the idea of human capital as a theory came an historical transformation of how education was perceived in capitalist society. In the rapidly industrialising Western European countries of the 19th and 20th century, education of the masses (at least to a certain level) was seen by the governments of the day less and less as a threatening empowerment of the "dangerous classes", and became more and more economically justifiable and desirable. Likewise, global capitalist market relations has even slowly taken this theory to many parts of the formerly colonised world. Whereas in the past, even as recently as the 1940s, colonial powers were on the whole more than happy to keep the savage and potentially rebellious natives of Asia, Australia, Africa and Latin America in ignorance. Not all that much has really changed, but nowadays even neo-imperialist institutions such as the World Bank openly call for mass education systems in the South. In its 1991 World Development Report for example, the World Bank wrote that "investing in people, if done right... provides the firmest foundation for development."

In Australia, human capital theory also has a strong influence. It plays a central role in both the ALP and Liberal party education policies, and the (not-so-progressive) Democrats also actively support it: as the 1996 Liberal government Education budget was released, one of the first public comments their Education spokesperson, Natasha Stott Despoja made was that it threatened to "damage Australia's investment in the future". The importance of this theory in current government policy can be seen in a report published in 1994 by the Australian Commonwealth. In it it states that "the need to maintain competitiveness in the global market may require that access to higher education is expanded and that opportunities for skills upgrading at the higher education level are increased to increase the breadth and depth of the skills base of the workforce."

Human Capital Theory: Right-Wing Conspiracy?

The support of the human capital theory from these sources alone makes it attractive for the Left to dismiss the theory altogether as something that will naturally always work in the favour of the incumbent economic and political forces. This *ad hominem* argument fails to criticise where criticism is due. In the abstract, human capital theory is nothing more than an improvement in a person's skills and capabilites, a way of enabling a fuller development of a human's creative and innovative abilities. In a world of scarce resources, it is also a way economic growth could in theory be sustained-- this may not seem like a very progressive argument in a country like Australia, where existing poverty is a problem of distribution rather than production. But if a massive redistribution of economic development and wealth does not occur in the future, large sectors of the population in Africa, Asia, Latin America and parts of Europe could find the human capital value-adding process as a useful and empowering tool in the eradication of their own poverty. And barring any drastic decrease in the consumption levels in industrialised countries and population growth levels, human innovativeness and a subsequent improvement in technology and efficiency could in theory offer hope for an ecologically sustainable economic system.



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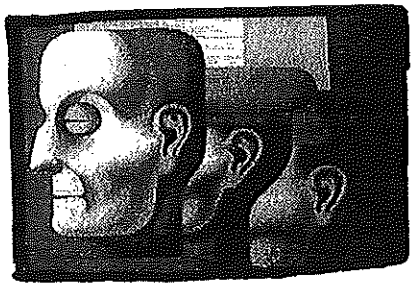


Capitalism, capitalism, everywhere capitalism

These benefits are, as I have stressed, theoretical benefits; before we give a hip-hip hooray for human capital theory, it must be remembered what the nature of the capitalist economic system is, and how human capital (otherwise known as workers) relates to it. The economy which surrounds us and within which we are forced to participate in on a daily basis is one which upholds the values of private ownership of the means of production, self-interest, individualism, profit maximisation, and production for the purpose of ongoing, neverending, senseless accumulation of massive wealth in the hands of a few instead of addressing the needs of the many. Lofty goals of using human capital theory in the economy as a tool to develop the creative abilities of humans, of eradicating poverty worldwide and preventing a forthcoming ecological collapse ranks a distant second to capitalism's number one use for it: making money.

It is within this economic context that the benefits derived from education as a human capital value-adding process accrue above all not to society as a whole but to the private owners of the means of production and individual members of the middle classes (read middle management) who receive larger financial compensation for their labour. Although there are obvious exceptions to this in Australia, as it has a mixed, and not purely capitalist, economy, it is nonetheless justifiable to make the generalisation that the years and years of training and education university graduates undergo contributes first and foremost to the thickness of the employer's and, with a bit of luck, their own pocketbook.

(Without the dogma)

Many standard Left critiques of tertiary education within capitalism, (blinded by the need to conform to dogma) would abhor the argument that graduates derive any meaningful individual benefits from time spent at university. This is substantiated on two grounds: firstly, an education system that serves the narrow profit-related interests of capital becomes nothing less than a means by which to increase the productivity and hence profitability of labour. Secondly, it stops the education system from becoming a process of intellectualisation. Intellectualisation is not meant in the elitist, stuffy academic sense, but as the development of perception, thought and critical interpretation of the surrounding world (NB: one anarchist somewhere once wrote that "our goal is to make everyone intellectuals"). What the student learns at university is not so much due to personal choice, but in accordance with the skills demanded by the market at that time. The end result is university graduates as alienated intellectual prostitutes, exploited of their acquired skills. Their plight is therefore the same as that of a factory worker: he or she may sit behind a computer instead of on an assembly line, but they are all mere cogs in the great, big capitalist machine.

DUCATION FOR SOCIAL NEED NOT CORPORATE GREED

N ANALYSIS OF CORPORATE INTERVENTION INTO OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM

ur Universities are killing machines. Every war machine nd tactic, every smart bomb, every pesticide or dangerous hemical, every dodgy ETS, every aspect of mining echnology used to exploit people of the non-western /orld was either developed in a University or invented by a Jniversity graduate.

Universities are the breeding grounds for military technology and the development of environmentally destructive and socially unjust research and education. Of still greater concern is the role that our universities play in helping to create the conditions required for the continued exploitation of people and our environment.

creasingly, Universities provide a "social service" for rporate rule through reinforcing and upholding the current stem where corporate priorities reign. The corporatisation our education system is resulting in corporations, whether rmally or informally, becoming the decision makers in ur universities. Universities are becoming a resource for rporations, providing for their ongoing profit making rather an a resource controlled by people and used for the benefit f society.

Over the last four years, the Howard government has conducted a massive assault on the public education system. Taking up where the ALP left off in their moves towards privatising education, the Liberals have furthered this agenda with ruthless funding cuts, increases in HECS, upfront fees quotas for domestic undergraduates and the proposal of the complete deregulation and marketisation of education.

To understand what pure, free market education will achieve in terms of social benefit we only need to look at the contemporary example of Melb uni private. Melb uni private provided training for three Indonesian military officials. They were trained in the Defence and Strategic studies program of the private uni. So where does an education based on the profit motive and free market deliver social and environmental ethics?

Instead of making a united stance against the Liberal funding cuts and demanding the reversal of the cuts, Universities are embracing the governments economic rationalist agenda. University administrations are using the insufficient government funding levels as an excuse to actively seek out corporate funding and sponsorship. Universities are spending millions marketing their image to corporations often setting up whole arms of the university administration that exist to the sole purpose of business liason and creating corporate "partnerships"

Corporations are eager to fill the void created by the lack of government funding through providing resources and significant funds for educational institutions. This includes the sponsoring of institutions, courses, subjects or faculties, sponsoring individual students, sponsoring sports teams and funding research

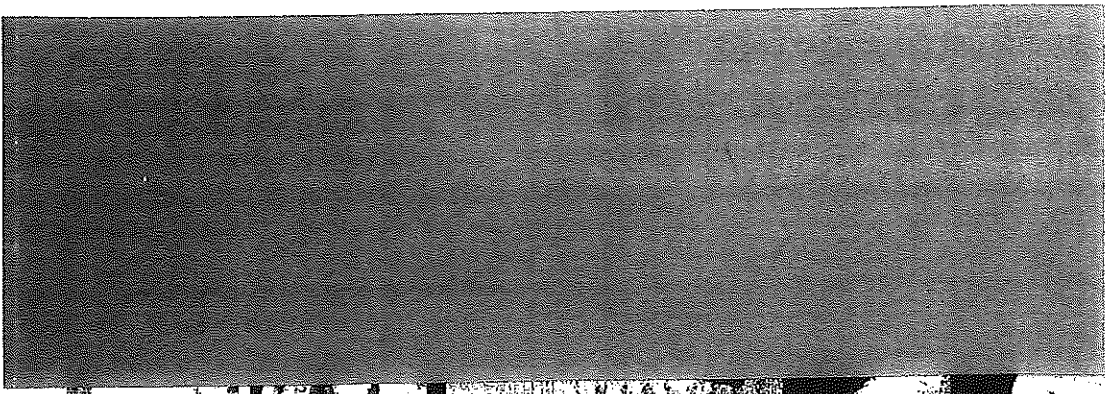
In 1996, Sydney University received 13.1 million from corporate donations. Some of the major contributors were: BHP, Boral, WMC, and the Aust Dept of Defence. Western Mining Corporation also provides the wages for a chair of the Geophysics laboratory. Hard to see how the geophysics faculty could ever critique the actions of companies such as WMC isn't it?

At Universities, courses are increasingly tailored to the needs of industry. Many Universities have overwhelming representation of industry and large corporations on decision making bodies of the university such as university councils or senates.

The chancellor of Sydney Uni, Dame Leonie Kramer was a director of Western Mining Corporation for 12 years and at the same time sat on the board of the ANZ bank. WMC mining operations in the Philippines are exploiting indigenous lands and people. WMC is receiving military assistance to ensure the company's continued access to the land despite the dissent of the indigenous people. WMC's actions in the Philippines are reminiscent of Shells deadly operations in Niger delta. Representatives of Shell sit on the University councils of UNSW and RMIT.

Corporations also provide learning materials as well as guest lecturers, field trips and work placements. Both students and academics conduct research and undertake consultancy work for the needs of corporations and the military. Due to the priorities of the government and business, this research and consultancy work often leads to further social and environmental destruction.

At UQ in 1990, UniQuest was set up. It is through business liaison units like this that UQ has managed to secure research millions of dollars in research funding from BHP which has resulted in new, more efficient mining technologies. These technologies are currently being trialed in third world countries where there are less stringent



The funding of research by corporations means that it is corporations who mine where research will be conducted. Questions such as "Is it saleable" and "Is it efficient" become the determining factors as to whether or not research is given funding. Universities become factories in a marketplace of ideas where knowledge is bought and sold. Research is a commodity that can be owned rather than ideas that can be freely exchanged for social benefit.

When business enters education, it sells something more important than the brand names of its products. It sells a way of looking at the world and at oneself. It sells the predictability of the system it depends on for profits. It sells the relinquishing of the critical capacity of education. It sells a circumscribed, job-specific utility.

The corporatisation of education is a direct attack on democracy. Through corporate intervention into our education we learn to view everything the way that big business would like us to. It is not because big business are good corporate citizens that they deal out money to educational institutions. It is a carefully planned move to subscribe people to the views that will keep the capitalist mode of production turning, to make sure there is an accepting workforce and as apathetic, consuming population.

Marx said ' When markets become dominant, market relations constitute not only the possible but also interpretations of the possible."
A corporate education will therefore only reiterate the status quo encouraging a narrow perspective and destroying the possibility for independent thought, critical analysis and dissent.

A corporate education, based on market values will produce citizens with little social conscience, with no great feeling of community and less foundation of examined, agreed and fundamental principles, upon which they can evaluate the questions, trends and issues of contemporary society.

The International Organisation of Consumers Union says the corporate sector is using education to:

- counter perceived anti-business culture (particularly in response to political pressure groups)
- privatise the public education system by stealth
- promote free market ideology
- use educational institutions as a market for their commercial activities and propaganda

They will not make the contemporary world; they will be made by it. They will not make it because they have never learnt how to make it, or still worse, because they have never learnt that it could be within their power to share in the making of it.

The more dependent an educational institution is on corporate funds, the less likely it will be to teach students to question the means and motivations of business. Education is being manipulated by corporations as a tool to deliver ongoing, reliable corporate profits. This is resulting in the substitution of market values for democratic values in what is no longer a public education system.

Free, Public Education and the sharing of information and knowledge is essential if we are to move towards a more democratic society. Education needs to be publically accountable and publically controlled if it is ever to provide education and research that is of benefit to all of society rather than the corporate elite. We must fight to get corporations out of our education system and to regain an education that is publically funded and publically directed.

Corporate influence supplants the democratic notion of education preparing students for participation in community and society with that of preparing students for life as workers in the free-market enterprise system. Students aren't learning how to be thinkers or citizens, but rather consumers.

by fleur chapman

education and human capital

by andrew gibson

The Coalitions agenda towards higher ucation, whether it be secondary or tertiary, is to orce, as much as possible, the flow of government pital into these areas, while shifting the cost onto e individual through the user - pays mechanism, a gressive policy of the economic rationalists.

Indeed it was the ALP who paved the way for up ont fees, with it imposing, while in office for thirteen ars, a system very similar ideologically to that now oposed by the Coalition. The ALP introduced the capital ntributions made by individuals in tertiary education, aticularly universities.

In 1987 the ALP introduced the $250 Higher ducation Administrative Charges, amongst strong and idespread student opposition. To allay these fears the LP promised that this would not lead to tuition fees. In 988 the ALP allowed tuition fees to be charged for Post raduate students. In 1989 the ALP replaced HEAC harge with the Higher Education Contributions Scheme HECS), while being a significantly higher fee the overnment sidestepped the students tort of "can't pay, on't pay" by making the HECS tax a deferred tax, hereby students who during their study have very little oney are able to pay of the tax when entering the labour orce at the completion of their studies. When introduced he ALP promised students that HECS ould not rise above inflation. In 1991 the HECS tax was increased above inflation.

As we move further into this decade he ALP have focused more of the cost of niversity onto the individual. In 1992 Beasley, then Minister for Education, ttempted to abolish Austudy and replace it with a loans scheme, where students take out a loan from the state and start the spiral of life into debt. The loans scheme was introduced yet due to co-ordinated widespread student opposition Austudy was retained. Austudy however still remains below the poverty line and eligibility for the independent rate is still 22.

Since the introduction of the HECS tax, not only has it been a model for the world in making individuals pay while still retaining the guise of an open equitable system, it has also been a constant source of change as the ALP attempted to get more money out of students faster. The concept of a 25% reduction for those who pay up front was introduced, the payback rate has constantly been fiddled with and rising, while the percent of income tax paid towards your HECS tax has also steadily risen. The ALP also introduced in 1996 HECS up front to permanent residents in a further attempt to gain more money from the tertiary education system.

All these changes occurred while the number of students attending university rose, the Effective Full time Student Unit (EFTSU), money spent per student on each student, fell. The rise in student numbers, over 40% since the early eighties was not matched by an increase in staff, with staff increases being just over 20% in the corresponding time frame. This has lead to an increased workload on staff as well as a general lowering standard of education due to the financial as well as staffing constraints placed on the university system.

In terms of Federal funding to universities it has also decreased, with Macquarie now relying on just over 50%, with the rest coming from private sources, such as money raised through fees. The current proposed cuts to Universities serve to increase the revenue raising capabilities of students and further implement the user pays system.

With a recent tax report highlighting that the wealthiest 100 Australians it showed that the majority of them claimed a taxable income of below $20,000. A figure low enough for their children to be still eligible for Austudy. In this context, coupled with the discount for up front fees it shows that the upper classes have largely escaped the reforms that have been ongoing for over a decade. The user pays system clearly discriminates against the lower socio-economic end of society, with the poor paying more and the wealthy paying even less then before the onset of user pays..

With many contemplating the upcoming battle against the state there is often a 'romanticism' for the Whitlam days of education when it was free. Yet it never was free. Education does have to be paid for and often the argument that society bear the cost is reliant on the idea of the public benefit that arises through tertiary education. While this has some validity, the benefits are mostly reaped by the private sector in the ability it has in selecting labour from a skilled and educated work force. In today's climate education is to do with the demarcation of power and the illusionary benefits that it may bring to an individual in her or his capability to sell her or his labour for a higher price then one who has not had the 'benefit' of a publicly funded tertiary education system.

Vice Chancellors are not so much members of the enlightened academia but managers of a corporation that produces human capital

From this approach the view from the factory floor is hardly impressive as ones curriculum is not directed towards removing the repetition of everyday life but how individuals can now pay for their position on the production line. Simultaneously academics serving as quality control in a gluted market with little fiscal support form head office are constantly revising ways to ensure that their 'school' maintains production be it with increasingly scarce resources. University staff already being overworked and underpaid.

Given this, it is obvious that the AVCC are concerned that in terms of export dollars earned, trade in human capital is right up there with wheat. Further that any attempts to roughly remove public subsidy could well put these profits in jeopardy.

The current shock and widespread concern around possible cuts and increased fees best demonstrates the nature by which most students approach education, not so much as a tool for the liberation of the society and thereby being a form of direct public 'benefit' but more as a means of entering the labour market with more credentials then another. The reaction of the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC) demonstrates this point further by their past approval of post-grad fees now feel alarmed that their bip pocket is being too roughly handled. Yet as education has moved along the capitalist agenda in the form of economic rationalism, we see the Vice Chancellors are not so much members of the enlightened academia but managers of a corporation that produces

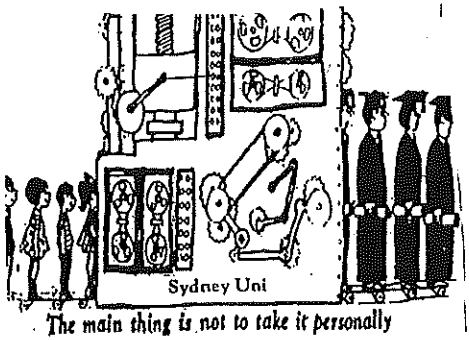
With the upcoming battle between state and students/ university staff already underway the nature of education should also be addressed. A healthy education system that works for the improvement of society rather then the individual is desirable, yet with the Kings and Queens of individuals (always found that strange about monarchists) residing in Canberra as well as most places of power in society, the fight should not be concerned primarily around further regressive fees but of the nature of tertiary education in itself.

In the Belly of the Beast

Basic truths about education and capitalism

(now as then)

> Let's stop kidding ourselves that universities, as they are currently formulated, will ever be centres of 'education for its own sake' or 'critical thinking'.



The main thing is not to take it personally

University has long been portrayed as a breathing space between the discipline of school and the rigour of the workplace, a space in which the student develops the capacity to think critically and independently. And with nostalgia for the sixties, university life is the time when students in their 'youthfulness' are permitted (even expected) to rebel – a little Students' rebellion should be confined within these boundaries and then, rebellion over, students should go about settling down to the more serious and responsible side of life (read: work).

In reality, universities are just one (albeit a more ambiguous one) of the apparatuses distributing people into their respective factories, offices and dole queues. This function has been made more obvious as every aspect of the universities – from the curriculum to the methods and levels of funding – is reconstructed in accord with the ALP government's economic strategy, providing a mass of highly-trained workers at low cost to the rich and the corporate sector, to ensure that 'Australia' is competitive in the international economy. This competitiveness extended to the rise of the university as an entrepreneur, earning export dollars through selling its courses overseas. The universities have come to be pushing two products: the university education and the university graduate. The student thus takes up the contradictory role of both product and consumer.

The 'clever country'-rhetoric made meeting the demands of industry the primary purpose of the university. This justified the further involvement of industry in the university, through such activities as sponsoring courses, sitting on university councils, influencing curriculum or directing research. All this influence comes at minimal cost to industry. In line with creating conditions favourable for capital, students are paying for industry's highly trained work force through the increasing shift of the cost of education onto students. Under the current ALP government, students have been faced with the introduction of upfront fees for overseas students and postgraduates; HECS and the subsequent increases to the level of HECS payable and decreases to the income threshold for repayment; and the Austudy loans scheme, a scheme whereby the Austudy grant is increasingly being replaced by a loan but it is given a voluntary face – students in giving up equal amounts of their Austudy grant to the loan required are effectively being charged an interest rate of 100%.

The Commodification of Education

Yet despite the more apparent regard for the needs of industry, the idea of the university as a critical institution is still peddled by the government, by university bureaucracies and by the Left. Everybody believes in the university as a place for 'critical thought' and 'academic freedom' it seems, some out of romanticised ideals and others out of mere opportunism.

The university is treated as an institution autonomous from capitalism. The Left, in romanticising the university in this way serves to mystify the university's role in reproducing and rationalising capitalist social relations. For, as Bertell Ollman has pointed out *'should universities be perceived as vocational schools, providing low-level skills and indoctrinating students with the values and attitudes deemed important by their future capitalist employers as a simple continuation of the tracking system already begun in high schools, the crucial ideological work of the university [in legitimising capitalist social relations] would suffer*

Thus, the university must maintain the appearance of allowing all points of view, including some critical of capitalism, to freely contest. So some space for 'academic freedom' is required but not too much. A few radical teachers, but not too many and (increasingly) not too radical. With the decline of tenure and rise of contracts, and direct funding contributions from industry towards specific faculties, academics are increasingly coming under pressure to behave in ways that are 'safe'. Such 'safe' behaviour starts with not being too critical of companies that may have sponsored courses and extends to greater efforts to publish in more mainstream journals (Left journals don't seem to 'count' anymore).

Radical courses, and other courses which are not immediately recognisable as vocational (though they do prepare students for careers in such areas as the public service and general administrative work) also have a place within the capitalist framework. Individualism and competitiveness dominate even the most 'progressive' of courses, yet this is hardly ever discussed. Does getting better marks than other students in your course on feminism, Marxism or anarchism mean that you are a better feminist/Marxist/anarchist?

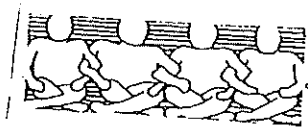
Universities do more than teach students the objective skills needed for success in the workplace; they are also immediately related to the formation of personality and consciousness. Through the institutional relationships to which students are subjected, the educational system attempts to tailor the self-concepts, aspirations and social-class identifications of individuals to the requirements of the social division of labour. Ever increasingly, university life has been organised on the basis of a complex system of tests, grades and degrees, so that people know exactly where they fit, what they deserve, what has to be done to rise another notch on the scale, and so on. Yet, it would seem that students are currently mystified as to their potential upward mobility – with graduate starting salaries and employment prospects at their lowest for almost two decades, many students can no longer count on a higher social position through employment, or any employment at all.

The social relationships within universities – the relationships between administrators and academics, academics and students, students and students, students and their work – mirror the hierarchical division on labour. Hierarchical relations are reflected in the vertical authority lines from administrators to lecturers to students. Workers' lack of control over, and input into, their work is paralleled by the student's lack of control over his or her curriculum. Isolation at work is reflected in the competition fostered between students through the 'grading' system.

In preparation for their integration into 'broader society' and the workplace, the capitalist educational system must try to teach students to be properly subordinate and render them feeling sufficiently isolated and alone. This will often serve to rule out in advance people feeling like they can get together and make a change to their material conditions of existence. Thus a primary reason for the Left's commitment to compulsory student unionism is the potential of student unions in providing a forum in which students can unite in collective struggle. Most students have little experience of collective organisation: their paid work while at university is often low-paid, non-unionised, casual and part-time, accepted under the (now often deluded) belief that they are being prepared, through their university education, for something better.

Perhaps the 'average student' can more easily recognise the university's place in a capitalist economy. So, let's stop kidding ourselves that universities, as they are currently formulated, will ever be centres of 'education for its own sake' / critical thinking. Rather, let's start by calling into question the whole curriculum through the corresponding questioning of the very system it is serving to maintain and reproduce. As Santiago Carrillo wrote:

> Capitalism needs the university as it needs the working class, but the university, like the working class, does not need capitalism. To such an extent as this is true that a thoroughgoing reform which would democratise education, raising its scientific level, its critical and pluralist character, and which would open it up to the great mass of young people, would only become a reality under a socialist regime.



holding hands and singing 'we shall overcome' is not going to be enough!

Under capitalism, the university is an institution replicating, supporting and preparing us for the existing and inequitable structures of society. But this need not be the case. The liberation of education – education for liberation – is tied to broader struggles for social transformation. Universities can only play a part in undermining capitalism if there is recognition of the place of the university within capitalism. Only from this starting point can we really challenge not only the university as it is currently constructed but also the system that has made it that way. The creation of a qualitatively different society can only come about when we are prepared to challenge fundamental aspects of existing arrangements. Students, while not the universal agents for change, can and must come together with other groups in society for collective and democratically-organised struggle in order to end the current oppression of people based on sex, class and race. The struggle for a new critical practice and alternative vision of the university should live and grow in the struggle for an alternative vision of society.

Cass Bennett ✪

education gats
at the crossroads
general agreement on trade in services

education for liberation fuck the degree factory

Performance-based funding is the method of tying funding to outcomes. PBF was tested on research student funding in 2001 under the *Knowledge and Innovation Policy*. The 2004 Science Statement, *Backing Australia's Ability II* furthers the Government's agenda of tying funding to government ideology- funding now becomes contingent upon the "mutual obligation" of Universities to undertake particular activities- rather than Universities- and students themselves- developing their own independent priorities. In the case of BAA2, funding will be provided to Universities to commercialise research, and undertake research into "priority areas". Under BAA2, Public funding is no longer a "right" of Universities, as it was under "block funding". This policy continues to engage in the removal of the autonomy of Universities to decide their own outcomes and agendas, and forces Universities to become an arm of the Federal Government, or to lose funding.

In dry economic terms, the details of the policy are that $5.3 Billion funding will be provided until 2011- BAA I was funding to be guaranteed only until 2004. Spending will peak in 2005-06 at $1077 million, then decline over the next five years to $1028 million in 2010-11. Government spending under the Backing Australia's Ability program will slump by one-third as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2011 - and also fails to keep up with inflation. Treasury itself has predicted that wages will grow 19 per cent by 2011, creating a funding shortfall of $250 million. Australia's total spending on research and development as a proportion of GDP is currently 1.53- well below other OECD nations, whose average research and development outlay is 2.1 per cent of GDP. Much of the money to be spent in this package will be spent on private business. The $1 Billion Commercial Ready program will fund 1700 small and medium businesses to develop products.

An example of how the Federal Government is dictating how public money will be spent is the focus on applied research (for commercial exploitation) rather than basic research. Research projects will now be assessed (even within Universities) for "commercial possibilities" in deciding whether to fund projects. Universities have had to develop areas of "Research Strengths" since 2001, and now have targeted areas of research. UTS, for example, will be choosing enrolling students in 2005, partially by their affiliation with the areas of Research Strengths.

In the past, students have applauded when new public postgraduate places for research students were funded. This becomes a different discourse, when 250 new postgraduate research scholarships will be funded "to develop skills in research commercialisation and intellectual property". Hence, new places might be funded, but they are targeted towards the proliferation of business and capital, and not on what individual students might see as important.

The "War Against Terrorism" Agenda: $7.2 million will be provided to Universities, research agencies and private businesses to co-ordinate and focus research in support of Australia's "counter-terrorism needs". Already, the call-out has been made within

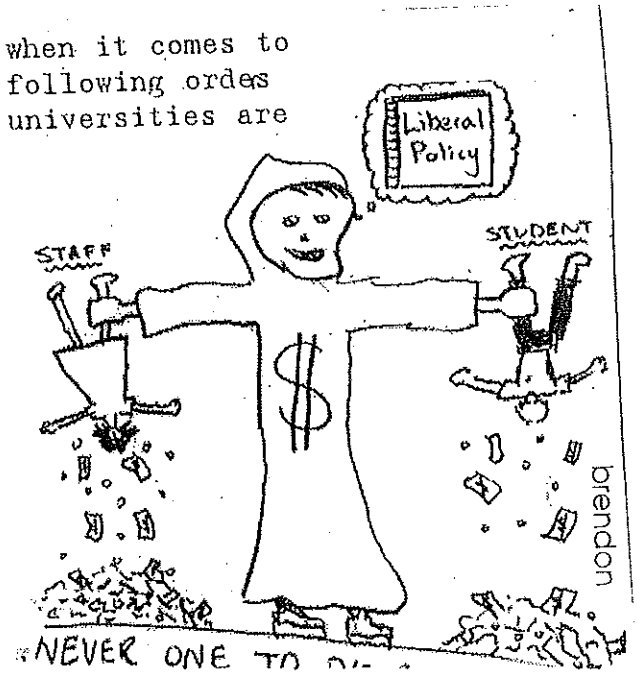
Universities to apply for funding. In particular, the Humanities and Social Sciences, within Universities, have been mentioned as being encouraged to apply for funding. Nine priorities have been identified which will be funded. These are:

- Large vehicle bomb
- DNA profiling
- perimeter protection
- chemical and biological detection
- chemical and biological decontamination
- infrastructure interdependency modelling and analysis
- radiological and nuclear threats
- datamining
- personnel protection from chemical, biological and radiological agents

The above begs the question of students wanting the Government to increasingly fund the sector, versus *how* increased Government spending is used. Already at UTS, the Australian Federal Police and UTS are spending 311k on research to develop "new technologies to prevent and fight crime and terrorism" which will support the Liberal Government's new research agenda to spend money on "The war against terror". "More funding" becomes a more complex call in 2005 when increased funding is being spent on, for example, the Liberal's new funding priority "Safeguarding Australia". This is one of the four National Research Priorities of the federal Government, announced in 2002.

As Universities become war factories, or are forced to apply for funding tied to commercial outcomes, new challenges are presented to activists on developing new discourses around funding, and challenging their own Universities on how to maintain independence, autonomy, and to ensure that Universities do not become involved in the production of weaponry and terror. Possibilities exist for students to implement policies and strategies to keep war off their Campus, as well as supporting the continuation of independent research, and to demand funding that is not tied to the Federal Government's neo-liberal agenda.

Cath Murphy
Postgraduate Researcher/Caseworker
UTS Students' Association



EDUCATION FOR WHO?

Make no mistake - these reforms are not just about making students pay more. They are an ideological attack on the fundamental principles of public education – who accesses it, how it is provided and who benefits.

TOWARDS A TWO TIERED SYSTEM

The explicitly stated aim of Nelson's attacks is to create a two-tiered tertiary education system- the Go8 sandstone universities and the rest. The Australian elite needs somewhere to send its children, and the educational standard of Australian universities has been so decimated that many now simply send their kids to uni overseas [this, not an out-of-character benevolence, is why Rupert Murdoch calls for more public funding for Australian universities]. By returning to a two-tiered system, the economically able, along with a token few 'bright disadvantaged kids' [perhaps via the pathetically inadequate Commonwealth Scholarships] will go to sandstone unis, whilst the rest of us are churned through vocationally oriented, poorly funded degree factories. These 'reforms' will decrease social mobility and intensify the intergenerational transfer of privilege.

Nelson's reforms are not about decreasing university places [as Shadow Minister Jenny Macklin haplessly claims], although this will probably be the effect. The Liberals are happy to expand the tertiary sector, so long as class divisions aren't threatened and people bear the cost for themselves.

This doesn't mean that we are facing the 'death of universities' or of 'public education', as the current NUS campaign claims. Public education in the fullest sense has been suffering 'death by a thousand cuts' since the re-introduction of university fees by the ALP in 1987, and associated intrusion of market relations and user pays mechanisms. But since the Liberals' election in 1996, the attacks have accelerated dramatically. If Nelson gets his way, 'Public Education' in Australia will come to have the same meaning as in the USA- i.e., a few 'public' universities within a primarily privatised and deregulated system.

:: WHAT ABOUT THE WORKING CLASS?

Working class participation in universities has always been low, and will be further eroded by these reforms. Studies have shown conclusively that deferred fees do deter people from lower socio-economic backgrounds [Nelson's own 'Crossroads Report' cites concrete evidence of this]. The lack of meaningful income support, uncertainty of future income, and the prospect of a lifetime of debt combine to make 'on the job training' a less risky option. For this reason the current NUS argument that we want university entrance to be based on 'merit not money' is radically flawed, mistakenly implying that the current university entrance system is based on 'merit' when in fact there are powerful inequalities at the secondary schooling level that ensure class-based stratification in the kind of degree choices available.

:: THE EXPERIENCE OF 'MIDDLE AUSTRALIA'

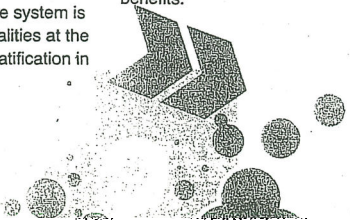
The main loser from Nelson's attacks will not be the working class, which is already primarily excluded from universities and will continue to be so, but rather 'middle Australia'- the traditional constituency of the Liberal Party. Menzies' rhetoric about the 'forgotten people' may have been a cynical exercise in maintaining capitalist class rule, but at least the Keynesian welfare state recognised the need for basic forms of state welfare to maintain social consensus. Saddling university graduates with decades of debt will not only increase social hierarchies [i.e increase the gap between the rich and the poor], but also undermine many pillars of conservative society- peoples' ability to start families and buy their own home will be greatly undermined if they are in debt until they're 35 or older

THE CHANGING ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Yet adequate funding of public services is possible – by cutting spending on the military and border protection, increasing corporate tax, and increasing income taxes on the super-rich. Under this federal government we have seen the exact opposite.

But the move to user-pays for once-public services is not about 'small government' as economists claim. Taxation revenue has increased under Howard- but spending priorities have shifted radically, from funding the Keynesian welfare state to funding the neo-liberal warfare state. Now not even Labor makes a clear argument for prioritising public sector funding over securing investment and securing 'our borders'. Fighting terrorism and the 'boat people invasion' is now presented as a core activity of government.

Slowly but surely the role of government has shifted. The 'social contract' now means 'mutual obligation'- from income support to loans schemes, welfare payments to Work for the Dole, and even proposals that pensioners and the disabled should work for their benefits.



EDUCATION FOR LIBERATION

FUCK THE DEGREE FACTORY!

Thanks to 'Summer School' and now 'Winter School', you can get a Commerce degree in two yrs- or a Masters in one. But the education now on offer, at sandstone as well as poorer unis, is a joke. In 1983 the average Arts student had more than 20 contact hours a week; now we are lucky to get 10. In the neo-liberal university, form triumphs over content- Arts faculties proudly display their dozens of departments in brochures, neglecting to mention that many 'departments' now consist of only one lecturer! Millions are spent on renovating sandstone buildings and on glossy advertising, while departments sink further into debt and crisis.

WELCOME TO McUNIVERSITY

But the 'dumbing down' of university life extends beyond a drop in contact hours. The space for critical learning about the nature of society has steadily eroded since the 1970s, and this process is continuing at a terrifying pace. More and more, tertiary education explicitly serves the needs of the corporate sector.

The corporatisation of universities has involved:
-The mass abolition of courses and departments not deemed 'profitable' or 'market-oriented', and the flourishing of corporate training junkets devoid of any real content (eg Management departments).
- Massive decreases in academic and general staffing, including a sharp rise in student:teacher ratios.
-Abolition of tenured positions, casualisation and individual-contract employment in many areas.
-The smashing of student democracy on campus, whether in the form of continuous attacks on student organisation funding or getting rid of common lunch hours and common student spaces on campus.
- Intensified user-pays ideology- you can't fart at uni now without having to pay a fee- whether for your transcript, for late library books (a sly fundraising scheme dressed up as a guarantee of 'equal access'), for computer access, for printing, for lab equipment, for course readers
- Intensification of competitive assessment, such as the virtual disappearance of pass-fail grading and the uni-wide enforcement of bell curves, which necessarily pit students against each other.
- The apparent withdrawal of government responsibility for universities. Fee deregulation, and the "flexibility" to implement workplace reform seemingly removes the "public" from public education, leaving such decisions with individual universities. The funding crisis gives the Federal Government the ability to enforce its 'labour market reform' priorities in funding agreements, and at the same time gives corporations the ability to intervene into faculty curriculum in a way previously unimagined.

'EDUCATION FOR EDUCATION'S SAKE'?

In all these ways, universities now explicitly serve the interests of the corporate sector and capitalism. In fact, industry 'joint-ventures' (such as the Australian Technology Park in Redfern, Sydney) and the appropriation of graduate research for commercial purposes mean that universities now play an integral role in capitalist production. Whereas previously universities' task was the **reproduction** of capitalist social relations (via the restriction of access to an elite few), now universities play a direct role in capitalist **production** and profit creation. As market relations have invaded university life, the boundaries between universities and wider society/economy have also eroded. This is most evident in the treatment of international students- whereas once free uni entry for SE Asian students was seen as a form of aid, now they are treated as cash cows in the 'lucrative' market for 'education services' in the Asia-Pacific. This move from aid to trade in international education means that education is now Australia's 5th biggest export earner. Another result of all of these changes has been the dispersal of student life and the increased difficulty in convincing students to come together to fight for change.

In the face of this outright assault on the university, it is sometimes said that we need a return to 'education for education's sake'. But this liberal idea romanticises a past that never existed. Education can never be neutral in its social and political objectives, and universities have always served to reproduce social hierarchies. Traditionally this has been by providing the future ruling class with the independent faculties required to run society, but increasingly it also involves providing working class kids with vocational skills for jobs in the virtual sweatshop of the 'knowledge economy'.

'ALL EDUCATION HAS AN INTENTION, A GOAL, WHICH CAN ONLY BE POLITICAL. EITHER IT MYSTIFIES REALITY BY RENDERING IT IMPENETRABLE AND OBSCURE OR IT UNMASKS THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES WHICH DETERMINE THE RELATIONSHIPS OF EXPLOITATION AND OPPRESSION AMONG PERSONS SO WE FIND OURSELVES CONFRONTED WITH A CLEAR OPTION: LIBERATION OR DOMINATION'.

ALICE IN LECTURELAND

By Michael Holgate, Sydeny University Education Action Group

I wonder how many times have you gone to a lecture and subsequently wanted to end your life rather than endure the last five minutes... You re not alone. You can see it in the words scratched into any orthogonal strip of desk in any lecture hall: "THIS IS BORING"..."ECONxxxx STOLE MY YOUTH"..."TAKE ME AWAY FROM HERE". Surely the world isn t such a boring place? Why are there so many subjects that bore the shit out of us to such an unbelievable extent? Of course all lectures aren t like this. But more and more of them are.

Have you ever gone to a class based on the belief that you can persevere through two semesters of hell for that one subject in the future that sounds so sugary in the Handbook...until you actually study it. This agony isn t a product of your unappreciative spirit. It s the product of an education system whose aim is to prepare you for a life of either bureaucratic or technocratic drudgery – you choose which.

In the minds of the people re-structuring the university recently, it is always to better suit business. After university, the life of work will just be a more regimented and slightly less alienated version of this sort of boring work. Even for the Distinction students. Instead of flexible studying hours, it will be nine-to-five and you will fit somewhere above the production line. The only difference is that we might start actually applying some knowledge instead of just getting examined on it.

We need something to enjoy, something we can touch and actually see the results of to escape this alienation... results that aren t someone else s score out of ten. Something we can spend as much time on as we like and be truly passionate about instead of rushing in time for the next deadline, like so many once-enthralled professors. Enter student organisations. Without student organisations, there would be nothing to counteract the drain of trying to get this piece of paper you re killing yourself for. I suggest you rip all of those posters off the walls and have a look at the blankness. This is a picture of VSU.

Intellectual communities based on something other than courses offer a refuge from the daily barrage of bullshit. Even if you re not a member of any club, these organisations and the union set up positive vibes throughout the whole campus and it s inevitable that you have been touched by them in many ways, if not just by seeing the nice bohemians hanging around.

These communities are a way of making everyone conscious of things not applicable to capitalist business. They let us form our identities. Take off your op shop trousers too, because there will be no more groups of people sitting around Manning discussing how cool the seventies were. Everyone will be too busy or simply won t appreciate it. Our whole student culture is under attack here by those who want us only to consume the latest trends and then study to increase our efficiency. Not only will we be poorer due to course fee increases, we will lose any dignity we have gained despite being poor.

Departments that have arisen out of the sort of analysis which leads to a critique of business are often there because the union fought for them to be there, against the will of the administration. The departments

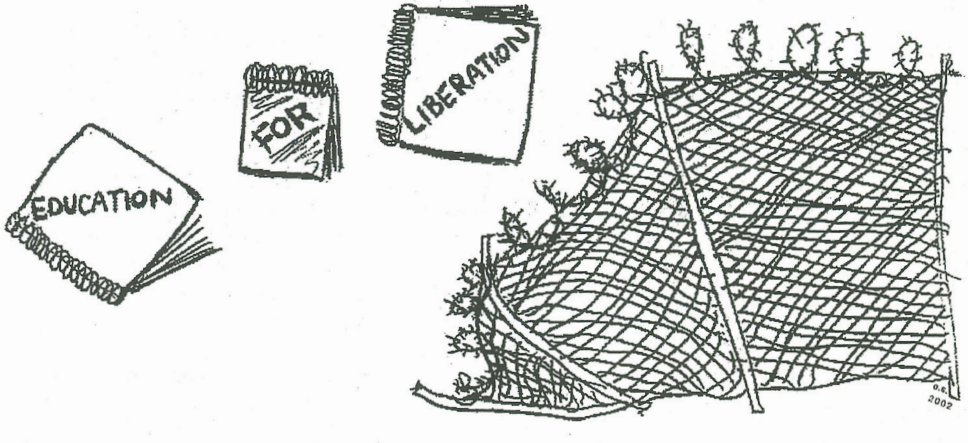
of Gender Studies and Political Economy at Sydney Uni were won by action from the student unions, through weeks of occupations and long campaigns about student control of course content. These popular departments simply would not have been formed under VSU.

Without our unions, our student organisations will disappear because there will be no advocacy to protect students from being driven too hard. There will be no money to fund any student organisations that are separate to and against capitalist industry. There will be a lot more bickering, lack of sleep, and complaining to your friends in lectures. There will be more asshole lecturers taking up your time, and there will be no way of escaping to do something closer to your own feelings.

There's one more damned than all. He never gambols,
Nor crawls, nor roars, but, from the rest withdrawn,
Gladly of this whole earth would make a shambles
And swallow up existence with a yawn...

It's BOREDOM. Tears have glued its eyes together.
You know it well, my Reader. This obscene
beast chain-smokes yawning for the guillotine —
Hypocrite reader! — You! — My twin! — My brother!

-Baudelaire, Au Lecteur



Kilroy Montgomery's

REVOLUTIONARY THEORY PAGE

education under capital

University has long been portrayed as a breathing space between the discipline of school and the rigour of the workplace, a space in which the student develops the capacity to think critically and independently. And with nostalgia for the sixties, university life is the time when students in their youthfulness are permitted (even expected) to rebel – a little Students' rebellion should be confined within these boundaries and then, rebellion over, students should go about settling down to the more serious and responsible side of life (read: work).

In reality, universities are just one (albeit a more ambiguous one) of the apparatuses distributing people into their respective factories, offices and dole queues. This function has been made more obvious as every aspect of the universities – from the curriculum to the methods and levels of funding – is reconstructed in accord with the ALP government's economic strategy, providing a mass of highly-trained workers at low cost to the rich and the corporate sector, to ensure that "Australia" is competitive in the international economy. This competitiveness extended to the rise of the university as an entrepreneur, earning export dollars through selling its courses overseas. The universities have come to be pushing two products: the university education and the university graduate. The student thus takes up the contradictory role of both product and consumer.

The clever country rhetoric made meeting the demands of industry the primary purpose of the university. This justified the further involvement of industry in the university, through such activities as sponsoring courses, sitting on university councils, influencing curriculum, or directing research. All this influence comes at minimal cost to industry. In line with creating conditions favourable for capital,

Let's stop kidding ourselves that universities, as they currently exist, will ever be centres of "education for its own sake" or "critical thinking"

students are paying for industry's highly trained work force through the increasing shift of the cost of education onto students. Under the Hawke/Keating (ALP) and Howard (Liberal) governments, students have been faced with the introduction of upfront fees for overseas students, postgraduates, and now undergraduates; HECS and the subsequent increases in the level of HECS payable for different courses; the decreases to the income threshold for repayment, etc.

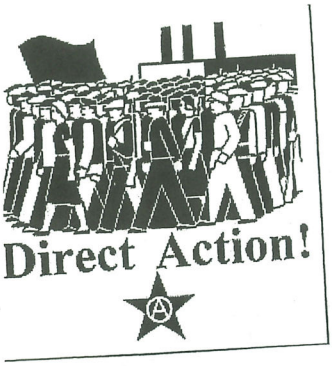
Yet despite the more apparent regard for the needs of industry, the idea of the university as a critical institution is still peddled by the government, by university bureaucracies, and by the Left. Everybody believes in the university as a place for

"critical thought" and "academic fre... it seems, some out of romanticised ... and others out of mere opportunism.

The university is treated as an ins... autonomous from capitalism. Thi... romanticising the university in this ... serves to mystify its role in reprodu... rationalising capitalist social relation... as Bertell Ollman has pointed out, ... *universities be perceived as vocational ... schools, proving low-level skills and ... indoctrinating students with the val... attitudes deemed important by the ... capitalist employers as a simple ex... of the tracking system already ... schools, the crucial ideological wo... university [in legitimising capitali... relations] would suffer irreparably.*

Thus, the university must maintain ... appearance of allowing all points ... including some critical of capitali... freely contest. So some space for ... "academic freedom" is required b... too much. A few radical teachers ... too many and (increasingly) not too ... With the decline of tenure and ... contracts, and direct funding cut... from industry towards specific ... academics are increasingly coming ... pressure to behave in ways that ... Such "safe" behaviour starts with ... too critical of companies that may ... sponsored courses and extends to ... efforts to publish in more mainstre... journals (Left journals don't seem to ... "count" anymore).

Radical courses, and other courses ... are not immediately recognisable as ...



students for careers in such areas as the public service and general administrative work) also have a place within the capitalist framework. Individualism and competitiveness dominate even the most "progressive" of courses, yet this is hardly ever discussed. Does getting better marks than other students in your course on feminism, marxism or anarchism mean you are a better feminist/marxist/anarchist?

Universities do more than teach students the objective skills needed for success in the workplace; they are also immediately related to the formation of personality and consciousness. Through the institutional relationships to which students are subjected, the educational system attempts to tailor the self-concepts, aspirations and social-class identification of individuals to the requirements of the social division of labour. Ever increasingly, university life has been organised on the basis of a complex system of tests, grades and degrees, so that people know exactly where they fit, what they deserve, what has to be done to rise to another notch on the scale, and so on. Yet, it would seem that students are currently mystified as to their potential upward mobility – with graduate starting salaries at their lowest for over two decades, many students can no longer count on a higher social position through employment, or any employment at all.

The social relationships within universities – the relationships between administrators and academics, academics and students, students and students, students and their work – mirror the hierarchical division of labour. Hierarchical relations are reflected in the vertical authority lines from vice-chancellors to lecturers to students. Workers' lack of control over, and input into, their work is paralleled by the student's lack of control over her or his curriculum. Isolation at work is reflected in the competition fostered between students through assessment – the "grading" system.

In preparation for their integration into "broader society" and the workplace, the capitalist educational system must try to teach students to be properly subordinate and leave them feeling sufficiently isolated and alone. This will often serve to rule out in advance people feeling like they can get together and make a change to their material conditions of existence. Thus a primary reason for the Left's commitment to compulsory student unionism is the potential of student unions in providing a forum in which students can unite in collective struggle. Most

Question what you learn
left alliance

Question what you learn
left alliance

students have little experience of collective organisation: their paid work while at university is often low-paid, non-unions, casual and part-time, accepted under the (now often deluded) belief that they are being prepared, through their university education, for something better.

Perhaps the "average student" can more easily recognise the university's place in a capitalist economy. So, let's stop kidding ourselves that universities, as they are currently formulated, will ever be centres of "education for its own sake"/critical thinking. Rather, let's start by calling into question the whole curriculum through the corresponding questioning of the very system it is serving to maintain and reproduce. As Santiago Carrillo wrote:

Capitalism needs the university as it needs the working class, but the university, like the working class, does not need capitalism. To such an extent as this is true that a throughgoing reform which would democratise education, raising its scientific level, its critical and pluralist character, and which would open it up to the great mass of young people, would only become a reality under a socialist regime.

Under capitalism, the university is an institution replicating, supporting, and preparing us for the existing and inequitable structures of society. But this need not be the case. The liberation of education – education for liberation – is tied to broader struggles for social transformation. Universities can only play a part in undermining capitalism if there is recognition of the place of university within capitalism. Only from this starting point can we really challenge not only the university as it is currently constructed, but also the system that has made it that way. The creation of a qualitatively different society can only come about when we are prepared to challenge fundamental aspects of existing arrangements. Students, while not the universal agents for change, can and must come together with other groups in society for collective and democratically-organised struggle in order to end the current oppression of people based on sex, class and race. The struggle for a new critical practice and alternative vision of the university should live and grow in the struggle for an alternative vision of society.

Question what you learn
left alliance

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SABOTAGE

SOLIDARITY

REVOLUTION

Because they're trying to silence our student unions.

Because our unis are used as a think-tank for the military.

Because creating docile wage slaves is more important than liberating our minds.

Because youth allowance is below the poverty line.

Because unis feed corporate greed not social need.

DUCATION BLOC. FORBES CONVERGENCE. 2005